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URBABABBLE

FOREWORD

This excursion into the language of professional urbanism began over lunch. We had just come from a meeting where one official had spoken entirely in jargon. Programs were "on line" or "on stream." Agencies were "gearing up" to do this or that. Our "troops" were ready to "hit the ground running" in order to "stay out ahead of the wave."

Everybody uses jargon now and then, but this individual had so completely replaced ordinary speech with it that we were all for the moment sensitized to buzzwords. Over lunch we began to recollect some of his more wonderfully mixed metaphors and neologisms. We thought of others we had come across or used, sometimes pouring them out in such clots the writer had trouble keeping up with us. In half an hour the list was several pages long.

Our word game led to a spoof, "A Practioner's Tale." It was one of those things people do late at night. It was meant for the group who had been at the lunch. They read it, found it amusing and xeroxed it for others. These people, in turn, began to drop by with favorite buzzwords of their own to add to the now considerable list.

In the course of all this playing with jargon, one began to hear it in a different way. Instead of conventional verbal tokens, the words and phrases regained some of their literal meaning. Metaphors - occasionally quite odd ones - rose out of a flat language. One began to think seriously about derivations and what they might mean in terms of an urban enterprise char-

acterized by these words rather than others. There was more here than one would have suspected.

Some thoughts about the significance of the language and its relation to its subject matter are offered in the short essay at the end of this report. It is a line of inquiry - so different from conventional research emphasis on needs, process, programs and impact - that could be carried much further. What the approach promises is a way into an obscure area of assumptions and values which are rarely discussed and in some cases virtually undiscussable because of the taboos surrounding them. This is especially so in regard to race and class, awkward considerations Urbababble handles by throwing over them a large dust sheet marked "low/mod households."

But here is a case where serious things cannot be treated too seriously if more people are to be cajoled into talking about them. A little parody seemed a good way to begin. Therefore, with thanks to Richard D. Rosen who inspired the title with his book Psychobabble, and to many warmly remembered colleagues, here is an "in-depth" tour through the world of urban jargon.

RF

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URBABABBLE CONSIDERED

I

A PRACTIONER'S TALE

Our hero (though in Urbababble there really are none) is Henry. Henry is a practioner. Henry's chosen task in life is to make things better, or better put, to improve the quality of life for all residents. While he was still in planning school the phrase, "a decent home and suitable living environment," had been, as it were, xeroxed on his soul.

For several years now Henry has been into community development. As a local government official, Henry is clearly on his way up the CD ladder. One day he will be the top of the line. Part of the reason for this is that he is a team player, which is very important if you are to get the job done. As his colleagues will tell you, Henry has been willing to take on the tough ones (even while maintaining a low profile), to handle the crazies, to bite the bullet if that is required. To show how risk oblivious he can be in a one-on-one with a policy maker, Henry has actually advocated triage - though that must remain part of the hidden agenda in our city, which is one of the distressed.

"Henry," the CD director said to him recently, "We have to gear up for some concentrated decision-making. Our mandate is to choose one more impacted area as an NSA, and we could be in a bind on this one. We've got to show a good faith low/mod effort, but the mayor's hot to have us step up our capture rate on these young professional "back to the city" types. I'm willing to pull out all the stops for you, but I want to see you hit the ground running. You've got two days, kiddo."

In Henry's personal time frame the assignment represented a potential career breakthrough. At the very least it was a quantum responsibility leap since, until that moment, Henry had been pigeon-holed as a facilitator, an information gatherer, a specialist in interfacing with the community. He spent most of his in-house time helping to prioritize options for decision-makers as new programs came on line.

His boldest initiative to date - his reputation was based on it - had been to abort the bail-out of a troubled 221(d)(3) project. He had taken a good look at it, come to grips with the problem, and had decided that, given the social balance sheet, throwing money at it just wouldn't do the job. The bottom line on that particular black hole (black hole as in outer space rather than Calcutta) was that it was going down the tubes without even a mid-range hope of viability.

Henry based that recommendation on feedback gained from his in-depth involvement in the CP process during the hearings stage of the City's multiphasic CD cycle. Community leaders helped him to zero in on the fact that there was no way Freedom Acres was ever going to turn around. This was no mere self-fulfilling prophecy. Its low/mod tenants simply didn't have their act together. It had started out as a model community - with new infrastructure, comprehensive social services needs assessment, a jobs creation component, TA for tenant leadership capacity building, the whole works - but somehow things never reached the take-off point. Even when logitudinal evaluation studies began to show that the whole ball of wax was coming unglued, HUD was still in bed with the Freedom Acres concept and

pushing like hell to have it replicated nation-wide; but at that point in time when Henry entered the stage, anybody could see it was just going to turn into one more horror story for the Feds.

Henry had gone way out on a limb on that one. The issue was hotly debated. There were a lot of people who wanted to dump the City's whole Sec 8 allocation into Freedom Acres, even if they also knew that it had gone critical.

"Sorry," Henry had said. "I know the political realities, but there's no way we can retrofit any kind of rationale for this one, I don't care what kind of cost/benefit bundles you bring in. What the Feds have put in place here is a real disaster. If we don't want to get locked in with them, we've got to cut our losses and pull the plug."

"The jury isn't in yet," they argued.

"Look," Henry replied, "I've laid it all out for you. If you want to deal with this in any kind of serious way you won't sign off on their game plan. Let them take the high road, but I promise you they don't have a mechanism in place that will get at the question of the basic match/mismatch parameters here."

Thus it was that Henry stuck with his recommendations - even submitting them in an action memo to the CD director - and thus it was he won his reputation as a take-charge guy. The CD director appreciated that. Flak catching is notoriously tough shit and you can get brownie points for doing it well.

So here a day later is Henry, being asked to head a task force (the task

force idea was a late stage buy-off to keep the crazies from pulling a sit-in) on the third NSA and facing a severe time crunch. "What I really need," he thought, "is a whole array of neighborhood-sensitive tools and techniques." But no chance of that. Talk about being up the decision tree without a paddle; yet then if Henry succeeds he may be noticed by the area office, and say what you like about the Feds, they make top dollar.

What Henry figures he's got to do is get input from people who have special expertise in manipulating small area data and cranking out what the Feds will be willing to buy in terms of an upgrading strategy with a low/mod hold harmless factor built in. What you'd need for that would be real time indices of neighborhood dynamics showing slack demand with fine grained selective marketing potential. Laying it out - let alone operationalizing it - could be a tough task. Henry feels a real straight jacket lurking in this one.

He does have friends over at the university's urban research center. For a moment his hopes rose as he thought about the $750,000 HUD research grant they'd won to provide new and vitally needed analytic capacity to local decision-makers. Henry grimaced. He liked them as individuals, but he had to admit it was the kind of thing that gives academics a bad name. They'd developed a black box that was supposed to provide all the answers, but on second thought he remembered that they'd been inputting data since 1975 and all they'd been able to tell anybody so far was that poor neighborhoods tend to have large numbers of poor people living in them.

No help from <u>that</u> shop. What Henry needs is a fast track approach. The

long term is fine for researchers, but Henry has to operate in the real world where "results-oriented" is the name of the game and timing is all important. So Henry sends off yet another action memo to his director, telling him the project will never be up to speed unless the agency staffs it up to at least a threshold level.

The boss sends Fred.

Fred is a good kid, bright, just out of planning school, still wet behind the ears but eager to learn. Once the tough decisions are made at a command level, Fred should be able to take the situation and matrix it out in physical/social cost-benefit terms. One look at Fred and you can see he is a born numbers cruncher, a technician who can be trained to produce the kind of data input that will help to make the whole scenario politically viable.

"The boss asked me to honcho this one," Henry said to Fred, "and it could be sensitive as hell. What we've got to come to grips with, off the record, is how to handle the interactive effects of new lifestyle demands and recyclable housing. There's no way we can finesse it and there's no simple programmatic response that's going to provide affordable low/mod spin-offs. Personally, I'd like to opt for a mediated solution, but no way that's going to happen in the present environment. It would just be counterproductive. The thing is, we can blah-blah-blah a lot of commonalities of interest, but if we can't prove commitment to neighborhood stabilization and protecting low/mod with every tool in our tool kit, the Acorn people are going to be after our ass."

"What I think you're telling me, Henry," said Fred, "is that we don't have much policy space on this one."

"Not unless we can be innovative as hell in achieving a balance," Henry replied. "Sometimes I almost wish I were in the private sector where they don't have all these damn constraints." At that his eyes lit up. "That gives me an idea. Maybe we could leverage private sector dollars to..."

"To boost confidence in a Type 3 neighborhood," broke in Fred with a neophyte's eagerness.

Henry turned white. "For God's sake don't mention Downs," he cried. "Never, never, ever talk about the stage theory of decline. You're dead if you talk about that kind of stuff. The crazies'll be after you in a minute yelling triage. And ontop of that, HUD is scared shitless of the subject because they funded Downs."

"I'm sorry, Henry," said Fred, much abashed. "I didn't know."

"Hey, don't worry about it. We all have to learn."

With that, Henry laid out the three neighborhoods they had to choose among for an NSA.

"What I want you to do," said Henry, "is to take a look at all three of them and lay out the factors and actors for me."

Fred looked blank.

"You know, what's happening, so to speak, statistics-wise. What are the population profiles, what kind of numbers have we got or could we make up."

Now Fred looked shocked.

"Around here we depend on hard thinking more than on hard data. It's

all a question of making the right trade-offs. That's why HUD loves us."

Henry spread out the map. Three areas were outlined in red. The first was Frog Hill, the second River Road, the third Colombine.

"Now let's just take a first cut at it," said Henry. We have some impressionistic data for starters. You could begin to spec it out like this," he continued as he went to the chalk board and began to write.

River Road	The Pits	Mostly minority. Very poor. Abandonment 35%. In need of large scale clearance and massive social services.
Colombine	Archie Bunkers	Blue collar. In need of moderate fix-up. Confidence building also needed. 45% of stock tract development.
Frog Hill	Hanging Plants	Brick row houses. Declining rooming house tenancy with conversions. Early signs of young professional interest, though no hard data. 32% elderly.

Henry erased the chalk board. "That's what we've got to work with," he said. "Interface with anybody you have to. Don't let anything fall between the cracks. Go to it, kid."

Even though he now had Fred digging into the data, Henry still felt bothered by not having a way to constellate the whole thing conceptually. It was coincidentally just then that Marvin Soplot called.

Marvin Soplot was a HUD GS-14 who had worked with Henry on a PD & R grant feasibility study for putting in place a technology transfer between the City's fiscal affairs department and CD-funded human service providers who

were willing to integrate their start-up personnel process with an outreach program for heroin addicts funded through an HEW crosswalk grant with DOL. The results of the study had been inconclusive, but Marvin and Henry had hit it off.

Since Marvin had lately been transferred to the new HUD Office of Building Materials Evaluation, Suburban Growth Controls and Self-Help Community Agriculture, he made a good confidante. Marvin couldn't care less about NSA's.

They went to lunch at the Tax Shelter, an excellent (and very expensive) restuarant in the stunningly revitalized market complex near the CD office. To preserve its old character, the market was still known as Entrails.

Henry explained his dilemma in regard to agendizing the costs and benefits of a likely NSA decision in a way that would fly. Information sharing was basically what he wanted.

Marvin liked to be asked for advice. It made him feel that deep down there were more things that united Federal and local officials than divided them. It was a good, warm feeling Marvin felt for Henry and for Henry's problem. And when you came right down to it - the bottom line - Marvin had a good, warm feeling about the whole multi-faceted urban challenge and the years he had spent at it.

"Well, I'll tell you," Marvin said. "You've asked the right fella. I'm a veteran of the wars, Henry, right back to before Model Cities. A hell of a lot of water over the dam since then. But let's put it on the table. We've still got a long way to go before we get a handle - a total handle - on

the urban problem, but we've come a long way. Not to forget that, Henry. We've got hundreds of thousands, millions of man-years of hands-on experience behind us. We've got people like you out there on the firing line. That's important. I want you to remember that, Henry. Sometimes you fellas overlook how critically important you are."

The waitress appeared. Marvin ordered a double dry martini and lobster salad; Henry, Perrier and quiche.

"I'll tell you what we are today that we weren't when I started out: we're proactive rather than reactive. That makes a hell of a difference, just one hell of a difference. Sure, we don't have all the answers yet. There's a lot we simply don't know, so let's cut out the crap. The thing is, we're finally beginning to ask the right questions. That's where your ultimate sign-off comes in."

Marvin shook his head at the wonder of it all.

"Let me put it to you this way - even if it's all been said before. If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. We have met the enemy and he is us. Operations drives out policy. It's all true! So goddam true, and we're finally beginning to get a handle on the basic issues. I can tell you - just speaking for myself - I'm not single sourcing answers anymore. There are too many sharp people like you out there. On-top of that there's a whole new generation of tools, some really fined-tuned mechanisms that have come on stream since I started out. Let's put it all together: it's one goddam new state-of-the-art.

The waitress returned with the desert menu. She smiled flirtatiously at Marvin. Marvin evaluated the menu and with a wink chose Boston cream pie.

It always amazed Henry that for a man you wouldn t exactly call attractive, Marvin seemed to bring out something in young women.

"Cute kid," Marvin said as she left. "Real cute kid. But to get back to what we were talking about, we're much more results-oriented than we were back in the old days. There's a real-time dimension to this business now that's going to keep us at it 25 hours a day if that's what it takes to get the job done. But you don't want rhetoric. You want expertise you can utilize on a minute by minute basis. And that's just where we come in. You won't find everybody down there in Washington agreeing with me, but the way I see it, we're basically resource persons providing support services for you fellas out there in the trenches."

Marvin sighed the sigh of a man who is willing to give his all and not count the cost.

"Look at it this way: I can't give you a cookbook solution, a magic bullet answer. Hell, you don't expect that. You just want some early warning feedback from me that's going to keep you out of one of those damn worst case situations. Okay. I'm with you. We're both grown up. Let's not bullshit each other. My problem is - this is off the record - how you're going to meet your low/mod criteria and still grab onto these new trends you say you've lucked into. I can tell you this: the Department's going to be taking a good hard look at this kind of situation. In fact the folks over in Embry's shop have asked the area offices to make a real effort to showcase demonstration projects that prove you can still benefit low/mod in rising markets. In fact, I think they're going to put out an RFP on spot gentrification approaches.

Anyway, it's got to be a multi-dimensional approach, not just bricks and mortar if you're going to pull it off. That's absolutely essential."

Unconsciously Marvin had begun to bang his desert fork on the table to emphasize his points. This attracted some amused attention on the part of the chic lunchtime crowd.

"I don't care what they say," Marvin declared. "Even with a budget crunch we still have a wide range of options. I'd turn in my badge tomorrow if I didn't believe that. We're in an action mode, and it's thanks to having people like you at the local level that we're beginning to win some victories. And let me tell you, confidentially, that at the Deputy Assistant Under Secretary level, you people have a proven track record. If anybody can come up with concrete programmatic steps that are going to give us a "fit" between helping people and helping place, it's you, Henry. I mean that sincerely, Henry."

Marvin's praise had been flattering and his advice no doubt right on target in a broad conceptual sense. Still, it had been a little short on specifics.

So it was that Henry decided to go visit his good friend, Harry Havarkian. Harry was a battle hardened veteran of the CDA/Model Cities wars, although he was only thirty-five. Since then he had prospered exceedingly as the "lead urban guy" in one of the country's largest consulting firms. Handsome, with a graying afro, a townhouse, a small Italian car priced at four times the national median income, and an irreverent sense of humor, Harry had instincts for shifting urban policy second to none. As someone once remark-

ed, on the gray Atlantic of urban problems, Harry always managed to swim in the warm Gulf Stream of Federal funds.

Henry was met at the door by Jeanette, Harry's girl friend. Harry had been married once, but that was a long time ago, when he was in his "All Power to the People" stage and wore fringed buckskins. Undergraduate follies, Harry called that bygone era. He also called Jeanette his mistress. It wasn't sexist, just part of his lifestyle, he explained. With a VW you have a girl friend, with something pricier a mistress is more appropriate. In any case, Jeanette was an extraordinarily sexy lady, even if a little hard to figure out. For Harry, anything less would have been unthinkable.

"Come to see your guru, have you?" Harry said, ushering Henry into a living room that looked like a greenhouse. "Perfect timing. You can help me with a little proposal I've been playing with."

Jeanette reappeared with Perrier, lemon and ice, then posed herself on the floor with her head on Harry's knee.

"Look," Harry began, "the Feds are all hot and bothered about gentrification and displacement and no affordable housing for low/mod, right? Right! Why they're pushing buttons and pulling levers like the guys in the control room at Three Mile Island. Section 8, condo conversion moratoria, rent control, non-service approaches. What works? Something's got to work! Do a study. Run an evaluation. Give us a quick and dirty on Seattle, Cincinnati, any goddam place. It's frigging Alice in Wonderland. They couldn't stop the tide when it was running out, they can't stop it when it's running in. Hopeless people. Absolutely hopeless people. Oh, but they pay!"

Harry swirled the ice in his glass with his finger.

"Now just try this on, my friend. A proposal to bring back blight as a way of keeping housing prices down. Of course you've got to have the right rhetoric - something like, "Strategies to Mitigate the Effects of Upgrading in order to Preserve Affordable Shelter Options for Low and Moderate Income Households." How's that? And programmatically you'd have things like maybe a rent-a-vandal project using school drop-outs. We'll show how to induce problem families to locate in the neighborhood. We'll bring in stripped cars and put them up on blocks. We'll figure out how to get banks into red-lining again and we'll have the City distribute litter on the streets. Media image? You make it as bad as you can. You feed crime stories to the Six O'clock News."

Harry beamed.

"It's perfect. Eighteen months, $250,000. Perfect, perfect, perfect."

He leaned forward, patting Jeanette on the head.

"But you know what scares me, my friend? You know what scares me shitless?" He lowered his voice to a stage whisper. "They'd fund it!"

"A lot of people wouldn't be amused," Henry said. "Some people could get very offended by that kind of stuff."

Harry opened his palms in mock despair.

"That's why I'm telling you. You have a sense of humor."

Actually Henry did not have a sense of humor, but it flattered him to be told that he did.

"Seriously," he said, "that whole subject is why I came over here." He

proceeded to explain his dilemma over the choice of the final NSA.

"Okay, my friend," said Harry. "All joking aside. Back to the real world. I can help you. But you've got to think in the future tense. What I'm going to give you is a bite on the thing. You'll have to do the translation. First of all, negotiated strategies. That's the name of the game these days. The foundations are getting into negotiated strategies with big bucks. Also privatization of local decision-making structures. Really takes the heat off. Matrix it out right and you won't have to be up front on this thing at all."

"No?"

"Absolutely not! You've just got to cast it the right way. You say, oh, something like, we're going to come at this totally innovatively, fully integrating the private sector into the resource allocation process...fully fleshed out guidelines will indicate sufficient impact analysis capability to monitor any negative pattern of locational choices that may fall out and make mid-course corrections...also public sector assisted build-up to achieve a critical mass of existing opinion leaders capable of conducting meaningful dialogue with all other relevant actors in order to properly agendize appropriate treatments if and when allocative dysfunctions begin to crop up... just a first cut at a read-out on possible indigenous stimulation routes, taking fully into cognizance spatial analogues for socio-economic population slices which may need to be built into the framework for decision-making ...plus, of course, allowance for the softness of existing data, compensated for by a range of indicators which should point, at least on a rough cut basis, to the directionality of outputs...not to mention secondary benefits that

include filling a critical knowledge gap. They always love to hear you're going to fill a critical knowledge gap. So there you are. You add the blah, blah, blah, slap on the boilerplate and you're home free."

Harry smiled a generous smile, thinking to himself that should he have provided as much in a consulting capacity, the fee would have paid for his car.

Before Henry could respond, Jeanette raised her head. She looked at them both rather queerly. It wasn't evident whether she had been listening or had had her mind on something else altogether.

"You can't make a lemon into lemon meringue pie," she said. It was her only remark during the entire visit.

Henry got back to the office to find a demonstration awaiting him. Or more accurately, several demonstrations. First and loudest was a Black and Hispanic contingent. They held up a sign identifying them as R. A. M. (Residents Against Manipulation). Henry knew them well. Their leader, Uhuru Dennison, a large, shaven-headed individual in a dashiki, flourished the sign and shouted, "Wuz comin' down, man? We had enough of yo' bullshit!"

Henry smiled weakly and promised him that no substantive decision-making would take place without full citizen input.

The second group were housewives from Colombine who apparently had heard a rumor that the City was planning a low-income housing project for their neighborhood. Their signs were of a virulently uncharitable nature and the group's attitude even more threatening than the first.

In the most conciliatory voice he could muster, Henry assured them that the goal of neighborhood stabilization was high on the City's priority list.

The third group, by far the most civilized, consisted of well-bred women in their middle or later years, along with a sprinkling of young men in corduroy jackets. Their signs were lettered SAVE OUR PROUD HERITAGE and NEIGHBORHOODS LIVE BY THOSE WHO LOVE THEM and FROG HILL'S ARCHITECTURE OUR TRUST. With a quick gesture, one of the protesters caught Henry by the sleeve, informed him that he had given $250 to the mayor's campaign, and just wanted him to know that something had to be done about "the rabble."

Safely behind his office door at last, Henry swallowed two Bufferin and straightened his tie. Just then Fred knocked. He too had run the gauntlet as he came to present his findings.

"Wow," said Fred. "Heavy."

"All in a day's work," Henry replied. "The thing you've just got to keep reminding them is that our objective is to help everybody."

"I know you're goal-oriented," said Fred. "That's one of the reasons I admire you, Henry. But how can you rescue the poor, stabilize the working class and attract the affluent all at the same time?"

"Not to worry," Henry answered. His old confidence was coming back. He was beginning to make sense out of the welter of advice that had been given him. "You've put your finger on it. But remember, we've learned a lot from the mistakes of the past. We're all on a learning curve in this business. The thing we're beginning to understand is that the door on the six-

ties has closed. We're into an opportunity period. Lock-step perceptions of inevitable blight and decay are winding down. There's a breaking wave of new settlement, and conceptually everything is up for grabs. The way I read it, we've got to get into a more entreprenurial mode if we're going to catch the train before it leaves the station. Anyway, what did you come up with?"

"Well, your impressions of Colombine and River Road were pretty accurate, and on Frog Hill, I drove around and figure approximately 23% of the population owns Volvos."

"Windshield survey, eh? Good going." Henry nodded his head. "Looks like things are moving even faster than we thought. Okay. Let's just stick with the 1970 census data on that."

Fred blinked. "But they're way out of whack by now in Frog Hill."

Henry made a noise as if to suggest that Truth may be entered by many doors. "In the sense that they don't precisely convey present reality," Henry said. "On the other hand, what we're really dealing with here is the build-up of a critical mass. Now you want to piggyback on that if you can. Or to put it another way, if you want to achieve a turn-around, score a breakthrough - and believe me, HUD is as hungry for that as we are - the project's got to be do-able. We can be a real catalyst in Frog Hill via the NSA route. That's the kind of neighborhood where intervention makes sense in bottom line terms."

"But won't there be a backlash from the people in River Road?"

"There could be, to the extent that the media picks up on it. That's why

I think we want to work along the lines of a public sector/private sector partnership, a kind of co-venturing in Frog Hill. Come at it from this side: River Road is just what the "Pockets of Poverty" UDAG is all about. You've got a wholly different set of parameters working in that situation.

Fred's expression spoke both of understanding and lost virginity.

"It's just dysfunctional," Henry continued, "that's the lesson we've learned, to pour good money after bad. The payback just doesn't make any kind of human or economic sense. I don't mean to say we're going to Quincy Market Frog Hill. We still have some Sec 8 existing to put in there for low/mod renters. But with an outreach marketing component for net payer households we can impact the future of Frog Hill in a very real way. We just can't do that for River Road."

"I follow you, Henry," said Fred. "This is the nitty-gritty they never taught us in planning school."

"It's the real world," Henry repeated. "Sometimes you can do it from the bottom up, sometimes you have to do it from the top down, but it comes to the same thing: it's got to be fundable and it's got to be do-able or you're just pissing in the wind."

"What next, Henry?"

"Well, we've got to write up the application. We're going to need some first class blah, blah, blah, and I think you're about ready to try your hand at that. If you haven't got all the numbers you need, use your best guesstimate. I'll make sure they're in the ballpark. What I want to pull off is presenting the whole NSA as a paradigm of cushioned assisted spontaneous re-

investment with the public sector getting maximum bang for the buck by operating on the margins. That's where the action is today."

"It really just boils down to marshalling your resources and then allocating them in a way that makes good strategic sense."

"Exactly," replied Henry.

"And that means sometimes you have to retrofit..."

"Logic," Henry concluded.

Fred picked up his notebooks and maps. "Thanks, Henry," he said. "Thanks a lot."

He paused at the door, as if unable to express his feelings about all that he had learned in such a short time. Then, with a little blush, he murmured: "And Henry...have a nice day."

GLOSSARY

This collection of urban terms only begins to cover an intriguing contemporary dialect. A number of the words and phrases listed are used in other professional spheres as well. It is in their combinations that the real flavor of Urbababble emerges. A note on the process of selection: we have tried to steer a middle course between expressions which are current in the national slang ("where he/she is coming from") and technical terminology ("targetted tandem," "fungibility"). We have furthermore tried to suggest the origins of the lexicon - an area someone one day may more systematically explore.

What is presented here is in a sense a primer - modest yet possibly useful for those completing their graduate education or just entering the field. Of all skills the mastery of the local dialect is among the most important for advancement. One may use jargon or avoid it; one ignores it or scorns it at peril to one's career. To the student or novice practioner, therefore, let us offer this council: if when you first hear someone say, "I would like to access that decision before it's cast in stone," you are tempted to make a sarcastic remark, "stifle," as Archie Bunker used to say. Remember that you have a lot to learn.

- A B C -

action — A good word. It is very desirable to be <u>action oriented.</u> This implies both purpose and effectiveness. Used as an adjective, as in <u>action memo</u> (presumably in contrast with flaccid, bureaucratic, ordinary memos). In its present sense <u>action</u> comes from Madison Avenue where it was coined in the early

1960's. Has had a long and honorable life, serving for example in such ad phrases as action underwear, action banking , the new action army. Action is only now beginning to fade from the scene. Wanting to be where the action is has, of course, become a widely distributed social goal as well as a goal for the action oriented urban professional. A warning note, however: one should avoid going where the action is if that is also where the shit is about to hit the fan.

assistance, technical — Commonly referred to as TA. A retired accountant advising a community development corporation is engaged in TA. At its worst - and some will argue that the worst is far from infrequent - TA can be a case of the "blind leading the blind." Recent example of usage: "The consultant's evaluation reported criticism of the TA providers for the 25 pilot cities that they were too 'deal oriented.'"

attack — No where is the war and war games metaphor more conspicuous than in this constantly used word. If we are to solve problems there must be both a strategy (q.v.) and a plan of attack. Thus it is that we charge forward into perilously uncertain metaphoric implications. In a deteriorating neighborhood who is the enemy? The banks? Absentee owners? The media? Indifferent city services (us)? Poor people with anti-social ways? The enemy seems to turn out to be a mixture of these, as well as abstractions we do not know how to affect (crime in particular), or individual victim-perpetrators we are on the attack to save.

bail out, bail-out — In the first instance one can presume a military origin, probably from the era of the U-2 rather than the P-38. The "eject" button is what you push when the situation has gone critical and you want to separate yourself definitively from a horror story. Example: "The way things are going in our CD office, I've got to think about bailing out ." (The response is likely to be, "What color is your parachute?") In the second instance, bailing out is what you do with a leaky boat. Example: "A bail-out of our public housing projects would cost an easy $100 million."

base, touch with — Borrowings from sports are far fewer than from computer sciences or the military but are not uncommon. Touching base is organizationally important to avoid being tagged out. In a coordinated inter-agency attack on a problem, for instance, it may be wise to touch base with EDA and DOL, as well as HUD, to make sure nobody's "nose is out of joint."

basics — If educational theory has been on its way back to basics, Urbababble can claim to have been rubbing metaphorical noses with them for some time. At any serious check someone is sure to advise getting back to basics. The only problem is that there is multitudinous disagreement about what they are.

blah, blah, blah — Origin unknown. Signifies necessary but pro forma rhetoric required to flesh out documents such as CD applications, responses to RFP's, affirmative action compliance questionnaires and the like. "I'll do the budget, you do the blah, blah, blah," is a directive painfully familiar to staff generalists who have come from literature backgrounds. One should not, however, feel completely used in this role. There are instances of persons having advanced to high positions in urban affairs on the basis of their skill with blah, blah, blah.

bottom(s) up/top down — A popular appositive formulation. Often employed with approach as in, "Over in our shop we shoot for a bottom(s) up approach to get really meaningful citizen input." It is generally felt that bottom(s) up is the more desirable since putatively the more democratic way of going about things, although in certain circumstances one can proceed from the top down without causing offence. Soliciting bids for municipal refuse collection is usually done on a top down basis.

brainstorm, brainstorming — With Franklin and Edison brainstorm came as a noun. In Urbababble it is exclusively a verb. One brainstorms with colleagues in brainstorming sessions perhaps to "expedite ways in which some new package of incentives can be shoved through the pipeline." The effort is always collective. It is bad form to announce that you have just had your own personal brainstorm.

broad gauge — From the 7' gauge established by the great 19th century civil engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, for his Great Western Railway. Final conversion of the GWR to standard gauge was completed in 1892. Probably few know whom they are honoring when they refer to a colleague as broad gauged (versatile, big picture oriented). It is interesting to contrast the achievements of Brunel in iron, stone and concrete with the more illusive achievements of broad gaugers in the contemporary urban sphere.

bucks — This enduring piece of slang has a special homeliness when used in the intergovernmental sphere. Example: "Those 701 bucks were very, very pop-

ular." From military planning and procurement comes the expression big bang for the buck. If the big urban bang was urban renewal, that legendary time has passed. We are into the era of less and therefore have a better developed sense of productivity, efficiency, return on investment and so forth - at least in theory. Will a home fix-up loan program or outright grants ultimately produce the bigger bang for the buck? One may never know but it shows one's head is in the right place to have asked the question. See also leveraging.

bullet, bite the — One of the few military borrowings that is primitive and bloody rather than technological. In the Civil War, for instance, one might be given a bullet to bite to take one's mind off the amputation of a mangled limb. In present usage biting the bullet, as in the course of canning a disastrous low interest loan program, usually indicates stoicism on the occasion of someone else's pain.

buy into — Borrowed from the go-go world of speculation. Indicates some program or activity perceived to be positive and in one's interest to be identified with. Now is a good time to be buying into public/private partnerships, gentrification-displacement, municipal energy initiatives, deferred infrastructure needs. By way of contrast, few canny public sector types will be found buying into 221(d)(3) or 236 housing project rescue efforts - unless their career strategies are based on specializing in bail-outs (q.v.). Special note: it has lately been observed that some smart money, rather than buying into neighborhoods (q.v.), seems to be selling this commodity short.

buzzword — Jargon for jargon. Less frequently heard these days.

change agent — Like catalyst the term implies a modestly intermediate function on one hand and a critical action role on the other. Both are ways of asserting that, "Without me/us, nothing." The metaphoric power in the words is such that the innocent may accept this assertion even without supporting evidence. Example: "The purpose of this office is to serve as a catalyst in stimulating enhanced cooperation and co-venturing between the public and the private sectors." (At the date of that announcement the office consisted of a precinct captain just entered on the public payroll and a secretary.)

clearinghouse — From banking. In its origins the word indicates a function absolutely prosaic in nature: the processing of checks, drafts and notes. In its Urbababble adaptation clearinghouse retains connotations of solid 19th century

banking practice, yet aspires to something more. Example: "What we're setting up over in our shop is a clearinghouse for innovative ideas that can be shared with practioners from around the country." One might note that the image here is really more that of a discriminating switchboard than a clearinghouse (where all routes are pre-established). In any case, clearinghouse is one of those cases in which the contemporary urbanist has put a private sector foundation beneath his elevated enterprise.

clout — A word of good old Anglo-Saxon origin. In common parlance conveys the image of hitting someone up aside the head. Urbababble has deleted the physical element and transformed the aggression into terms of bureaucratic power politics. Witness this exchange: "Are you going to get your grant?" "Hey, we have clout in the Deputy Assistant Under Secretary's office."

component — From computer sciences and hi-fi. A neutral, basal word. Its use implies sophistication on the part of the user as well as the thing talked about. (A lawn mower has parts; a computerized information system has components.) Novices have frequently found it helpful to practice the following sentence: "Citizen input is a key component in any viable neighborhood decision-making process."

comprehensive — A good word. A comprehensive strategy is obviously better than a strategy; a comprehensive approach preferable to an approach all by itself. To go at things comprehensively implies a view of the big picture, ultimate objectives, the bottom, bottom line. In the next world we can only pray that we will all be judged comprehensively.

crank in/out — From computer, systems slang. Suggests feeding raw data (especially numerical) into a something (process, mechanism, decision-making structure). Cranking out, of course, is the operation that takes place at the other end, where presumably things will make more sense.

- D E F -

dichotomy — A noun familiar to students of lit. crit. Also used as a noun in Urbababble but more frequent in its verbal form, dichotomize. Example: "In a gentrifying neighborhood the interests of long time low/mod residents and young professional newcomers may have so dichotomized that public sector intervention becomes a no-win situation."

dis, dys — Negative or reductive prefixes which seem to have a peculiar charm in the urbanist ear. One begins to hear dysfunctional, disincentive, disequilibrium, disaggregate more than functional, incentive, equilibrium or aggregate. A fetching new term is dissensus. The public, meanwhile, is still struggling with a simple lack of consensus.

evaluate, evaluation — Figuring out what you've actually done. The great bugaboo in the field since no one, really, has any idea what might or might not have happened anyway or is ultimately positive or negative in its effects (complicated by the lack of agreement about what are positive and negative effects). A single certainty can help to hold back this vision of néant on one's dark days: one has a job!

expertise — To be without it is to be classed among the clerical staff, although today one even finds word processing expertise. Entry level standards for achieving expertise need not be high. A summer as an assistant gym instructor should qualify one for expertise in the area of youth problems. A prominent urbanologist gained his reputation for expertise in neighborhood dynamics by conducting bus tours for the League of Women Voters. Note that for the average practioner it is generally preferable to have expertise than to be called an expert. This leaves some room for maneuver, should credentials ever be called into question. In point of fact, however, they seldom are. Since one may hope one's self one day to be called upon for expertise, one hesitates to cavil when Professor X is introduced at a conference as having expertise in a subject one suspects Professor X knows less about than any three cab drivers.

fall out — Origin the nuclear age. Signifies results, consequences - often of a less horrific sort than the term's original would suggest. The fact that a qualifier has come into frequent use as in, "We had a lot of negative fallout from last night's CP meeting," perversely implies that a little strontium 90 in your milk may be good for you. Also used as a verb: "We don't know what's going to fall out of the hearing before the city council on the Year V CD program, but we're hoping they'll give some thought to wrapping it up soon."

feedback — From computer sciences, cybernetics. An item now in the common slang heavily used by the speakers of Urbababble. A rough English equivalent is "reaction to." One may safely proceed on a course of action if there has been no negative feedback. The word takes on a grotesque poignancy when used on the personal plane. A middle aged planning head, for example, was once overheard in conversation with a new young CD director to this effect: "Look, I really need your feedback. Am I conceptually out of touch with what's coming down around here?"

funding source — Where pots of money are to be found. Happiness is having multiple on-going funding sources that have no problem with one's local agenda. As a general rule, it is wise to be sensitive to the sensitivities of one's funding source. For a very liberal but CD-funded CDC to picket the mayor's house because he has not come out strongly for the ERA and abortion is either to set principle far above self-interest or to be innocent of the rules of the game.

- G H I -

game, zero sum — From game theory. A zero sum game is one in which my gain is your loss and vice versa. Zero sum game is one of those appealing and easily graspable concepts which can literally change the lives of those who come suddenly upon them. Cases have been observed in which policy makers have based major decisions on zero sum game analysis simply because they so much enjoyed repeating the expression. Gentrification-displacement (q. v.) is now frequently read as a zero sum game.

gentrification — An English borrowing. Among the first to introduce it was a young English student at MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning who later went on to participate in the phenomenon he had at length described. Diffusion of the idea (if not the reality) has gone on like a grass fire in the years since 1976 or 1977. Now frequently - and some would say mindlessly - coupled with displacement to form one giant Germanic term, GENTRIFICATIONDISPLACEMENT. Under increasing pressure to arrest it while not yet having solved the problems of blight puts government actors in the position of having to open a dubious second front.

gut feeling, gut sense — Intuitions are obviously less to be trusted than objectively ascertainable facts. It is still permissable to appeal to intuition, however, particularly if you are the dominant presence in the room. To speak from a gut feeling or a gut sense is to state a disclaimer and make an assertion at the same time, viz: "Although research could prove me wrong, my gut feeling is we'll be okay if we go with this. " In most instances a mayor's gut feeling has as much or more weight in city hall than any $250,000 HUD research study on a subject. The gut feeling of a neighborhood activist who worked for the defeated candidate in the last mayor's race, on the other hand, is worth zilch. Note that the word "hunch" is almost never used.

handle — Used in the ubiquitous expression get a handle on. Signifies to gain some control over, either in intellectual or power terms. Reviewing an especially blighted neighborhood in an older Eastern city, one of its planners confessed that, "We don't have a programmatic handle on this area yet." Prompt use of the expression get a handle on will be one way for the novice to get a handle on his job.

impact — Also impacted (on, upon), impaction. From space exploration. Another slang word shared with society at large now. The visual image is of the lunar lander in a cloud of moon dust, the aural suggestion that of whacking sand with the back of a shovel. Note that the use of the preposition with impacted remains optional at this point, although it is more often omitted and for some reason seems to convey added force. "Urban renewal severely impacted the lifestyles of poor folks." Impaction is a word wonderfully descriptive of its own densifying effect. Example: "The study will attempt to determine the viability of the program's economic impaction in the target area." This probably means to say, "We're going to try to see if what they're doing down there does anybody any good."

infrastructure — To most people this means sewer pipes, water lines, roads, bridges and the like. Infrastructure is obviously a handier (if less graphic) term and is now much needed as problems of our deteriorating urban plant challenge poverty as a paramount concern. Future-oriented professionals are buying into (q.v.) infrastructure in increasing numbers as it begins to appear that that is where the action will be in the years ahead. Public works commissioners may soon be suprised at the staff talent eager to help them crunch their numbers.

innovation, innovative — Very good words. They have gained increasing currency since the mid-1970's and like option have probably done so because of the new latitude presented to city officials through CDBG. It is to be taken almost for granted that a successful neighborhood strategy will be an innovative strategy. Marketing, for example, is an innovative approach to neighborhood revitalization. "Sexy" is a risque version of innovative. There are some who ask how this obsession with sexiness and innovation will yield the tried and true. It is an undiplomatic question and should be avoided.

intervention — Medical origin (?). One can visualize Marcus Whelby with scalpel poised over vital tissue. Intervention is a "hot" urban term linked to a sense of options (q.v.). Intervention implies a godly overview (the deus ex machina) and a surgeon's confidence as one contemplates intruding upon a life process. It is reassuring, therefore, to know we are in competent hands, as witness this statement of municipal purpose: "Selective interventions will

be initiated and appropriate treatment modes established as negative factors begin to impact residents' locational decision-making process." Interventions, needless to say, are always designed to be beneficial, notwithstanding Thoreau's remark that nothing so filled him with alarm as the sight of a man approaching bent upon doing him good.

-J K L-

key — One of a set of adjectives which can be attached interchangeably with a set of frequently used nouns, as below:

	concern
key	
	question
critical	
	problem
crucial	
	area
important	
	determinant
vital	
	dimension
underlying	
	factor

leverage, leveraging — From finance. A very "hot" concept these days. The idea is to engage a larger share of private dollars with a smaller investment of public dollars. Leveraging ratios have become a small obsession. Establishing an adequate ratio to win a UDAG is like scoring high enough on your SAT's to make it into college. (In both cases some cheat.) Leveraging sounds a hard-headed private sector sort of approach to things, but then numbers are so wonderfully elastic that there are cases where cities eventually found themselves hoist on the wrong end of the lever. Bottom line: rediscovery of the private sector as a relevant actor on the urban stage.

liaison, liaize — From diplomacy. No obvious connection with the alternative definition: to carry on an adulterous relationship. This noun and its neologistic verbal off-spring refer to a considerable enterprise: that of trying to keep all the parts together. Liaizing, coordinating, orchestrating are different names, therefore, for what is essentially the same function. Although there may be liaison missions to the outside world, or joint projects to be orchestrated between the public and the private sector, the bulk of this ligature

work is internal. See also network. Persons specifically assigned liaison roles tend to be of little account; but the function is so pervasively important that it occupies much of the working life of upper level officials. In fact, it is one of the ways they get a sense of the big picture.

linkage. Of considerable portent in foreign affairs, the term is increasingly current in urban affairs as well, particularly in the economic development area. For the ordinary person "connection" might do, but that would not capture the combined cybernetic and mechanical imagery with their implications of powerful effect. Example: "If we're ever going to get Kentucky Fried Chicken to locate in this business strip, we're going to have to establish better linkages with the banks."

low/mod Elided form of low and moderate income households, a locution which has replaced poor people in Federal law and regulation. "Maximum benefit to low/mod" is a part of public sector background noise, somewhat on the order of a Hari Krishna chant just outside one's window. The blandness of the term makes the population for whom it stands exceedingly easy to deal with in the abstract - though from that alone flows many evils. Some critics have suggested that such now archaic and disreputable predecesor terms - the deserving poor, for one - might in the long run serve better for postulating issues of equity.

- M N O -

matrix From math, computer sciences. Also a common diagrammatic tool in housing and neighborhood analysis to show a variety of outcomes simultaneously. Increasingly used (without benefit of diagrams) to mean "figure out somehow or other." The term is helpful for lending technocratic authority. Example: "When you matrix out all the factors in the political equation, Ward 17 isn't going to get diddly-squat."

margin(s) The comers in the world of Urbababble, as in the larger society, appear to be influenced by neo-conservative values and minimalist expectations. They are leaving behind sixties liberals as they promote private sector involvement, stress opportunistic modalities, and point out that the real problem may be collapsing infrastructure more than poverty. It is with a certain humble yet building confidence that they announce that, "government can't do it all," and that our best hope may lie in "working at the margins."

mode — From computer and military science. Could be translated as "state," "condition." Calls to mind images of cathode tubes. Example: "Citizen participation can be seen along three dimensions: field, scope and mode." In more common usage, as in "Our program has gone into an action mode," the borrowing is probably from the jargon of military preparedness. Like task force, mode lends weight to what might otherwise seem sometimes fairly humble and fumbling endeavors.

neighborhood — More than a good word, neighborhood has become an urban icon. Though there is no commonly accepted definition of what neighborhoods are, the thrust of present urban policy is nevertheless to revitalize (q.v.), stabilize, preserve, upgrade, renew, maintain, improve, or otherwise assist them. Some decision-makers are now even to be found living in them, though to help gentrify a neighborhood is now considered something one should not do. As an example of the tonic power of the neighborhood idea, a candidate in a recent mayoral election vowed that, "nobody was going to out-neighborhood" him. (Somebody did.) Despite all of the above, there are signs of long term weakness in the idea, though probably not the reality. Some of the smart money is already moving into energy conservation, gentrification-displacement, and infrastructure renewal.

networks, networking — Illustrative of the new awareness of interconnectedness. If Urban Renewal was the age of the master plan and the big project, the present CD age is that of strategy and incrementalism. This has been frustrating for some (especially old style master planners), but it has been a boon for others (especially locally plugged in young generalists). "Networking a consensus" may be a tedious way to go about things, but at least it adds to your stock of contacts.

nuts and bolts — From common slang. "He's a nuts and bolts guy," is robust praise. You can practically see the overalls and the lunch bucket. Nuts and bolts people are involved with the nitty-gritty, people who bring hands-on experience to the job. All of this family of terms seems to show a desire, one might even call it a yearning for tokens of "real" work and signs of visible accomplishment - as opposed to red tape, paper shuffling, conferencing and the like.

option(s) — A very important word. In the days of categorical Federal grants there were no options to speak of in the present discretionary neighborhood development sense. President Nixon, who eventually lost all his, gave options to city officials through the New Federalism, for which they infrequently bless his name. General Revenue Sharing, CETA and the Community Development Block Grant spelled a new dawn of free will - with both responsibility and opportunity for urban generalists. For the past few years new people have

been setting new agendas, and in the process many of them have taken options on the power bases of their seniors. Whatever one does, one should get into options.

- P Q R -

package — From marketing. Most often encountered as a verb. Packaging amounts to an industry within the industry of community development. Concepts, policies, strategies, programs and projects all need to be bundled up for presentation to various audiences (other public sector actors, politicians, the media, private sector actors, residents). Package has several connotations of note. Among them are: pleasant suprise, present (as in Christmas package), tidy, neat, deliverable, an advertisment for the product within (as at the meat counter), easy to put a label on. Also has the connotation of being just the right size. Weren't you imagining something you could fairly easily hold in your hands?

parameters — A mathematical term. In contemporary slang, "limits" or "boundaries." Some dictionaries note that this usage, quite contrary to the mathematical meaning, is much disputed. If so, the dispute has not yet reached Urbababble. Of constant concern, on the other hand, are what the parameters are in any given situation. Generally they consist of politics, money, and community tolerance.

phase — The basic time-activity unit. Since few things in this world are simple, most projects and programs tend to be multi-phasic. To avoid the bends, practioners phase in new programs; and on occasion (Model Cities for example) prior interventions have even been phased out.

picture, big — By common agreement, the world of community development is such a confusion of needs, expectations and demands, let alone agencies, offices and programs, that it is hard to maintain a sense of ultimate purpose. This can be dangerous to one's mental health, and veterans council against asking existential questions such as, "Why am I doing this?" (Potentially risky in regard to almost anything one may be doing at the time.) A more positive approach is to seek an overview, to try to get the big picture which, presumably, will show how all the parts fit together.

plugged into — Computer slang. In the real world what gets plugged in is the toaster. Not so in Urbababble. To be plugged in in computer-speak is to be part of the information flow and the decision-making process. To hear of a male

friend (if one is male) that he is, "plugged into the Secretary's office (HUD, HEW, DOL, DOT) is liable to excite more envy than to hear that he is successful with women. The negative, interestingly, is "not to be plugged into" rather than "unplugged." One never hears of someone being unplugged. To pull the plug is quite another matter.

policy, policy making, policy planning — No word has a nobler ring, no activities more panache than policy and policy making or planning. To be among the policy makers is to have joined one's local conseil d'état so far as prestige is concerned. What exactly policy making means or how it comes about, however, are not at all that clear. For instance, is a middle level civil servant making policy when he consistently yet unobserved stifles the establishment of new business ventures by rigorous application of various codes? Be that as it may, improved policy making, opening up new policy space, reducing the constraints on comprehensive policy development are all virtuous things to be into. As a Federal official recently declared: "I am absolutely convinced that this world would be a better place if we could all do sound policy planning."

process — From cybernetics, operations research. Generally used to mean "how things get done." Example: "A desirable allocative process involves inputs from a range of actors." Translation: "Somebody is going to have to go to a hell of a lot of meetings."

pressure points — One first got to know them in first aid training. They are where you put your thumb to staunch the flow of blood in cases of serious injury. In Urbababble the use of pressure points does not conform to the Red Cross model. For instance: "We've got to find the pressure points so we can get a handle on that runaway CDC." Thus: to exert influence by threatening to choke off, to strangle when necessary, to deny sustenance for policy reasons, to make somebody cry "uncle."

private sector — Traditionally "business" as in Business Week. Consider a magazine titled Private Sector Week to gauge the shift wrought by language. These days the private sector has become the yang to the public sector yin. Public sector/private sector partnerships are a "hot" concept. See also leveraging.

problem(s) — A key to the Urbababble mentality and worth much pondering. A recently deceased theologian stopped once in the middle of a college lecture and - as if the thought had just then struck him - asked why it is that Americans conceive so many things in problem-solution terms. "Is it our

hubris," he wondered, "our illusion that technology will give us the ultimate answer to anything that bothers us?" Whether this is the case or not, Urbababble does suggest that though there is still a lot of work to be done, with enough commitment we can make a real dent in the problem and come out ontop in the end. The unconsidered (and perhaps unconsiderable) alternative to problem(s) is "condition," something we may really not be able to do much about and therefore ought to learn to live with.

public sector — Has something of the totality of tribal self names which mean, simply, "the people" or "the folk." As it is used, the term public sector tends to leave politics something of an unincorporated area within the larger boundaries. Politicians are certainly in but in some way are not of the public sector. They also frequently do not speak public sector language. Note that the term "government" is seldom heard and may soon be restricted to civics classes.

quantifiable, quantification — The urban arena has been the setting for a profound but little remarked contest involving numbers and values. Asserted needs, satisfied standards, production quotas all lie within the realm of statistical analysis. The definitions of rights, responsibilities, mutual obligations lie elsewhere. Thus have many millions of research dollars been spent in an attempt to answer questions that may be addressed with more sophistication in barber shops and pool halls.

Quincy Market — As a noun, Boston's revitalized 19th century market complex. That rehabilitation of a set of decrepit waterfront structures into a chic quartier has now spawned a verb. Example: "Baltimore is going to try to Quincy Market its inner harbor area." Because of its gentrification implications, the term will probably migrate toward the pejorative. Even now one can hear CD officials vowing at public meetings that, "We have no intention to Quincy Market this neighborhood. People always come before place with us."

real, a very — Example of a devalued intensifier. Thus a "sense of purpose" hardly counts for anything and "a real sense of purpose" doesn't score much higher. "A very real sense of purpose" begins to establish one's bona fides.

research, researcher — Research, especially of the social science variety, was once seen as the headlight that would help guide us through the urban darkness. It is now argued that the light has failed. To put it another way, if you are going up before Senator Proxmire for more research money, forget about polling

local officials for their endorsement of studies they feel significantly interpreted or helped to improve the urban condition. (More embarrassing is to ask them to name any three studies they can even remember.) Note: if they persist, researchers eventually become scholars. Scholars are, by definition, experts; yet it is striking how many of them depend for their best insights on field experience gained when they were but novice researchers - before all their time was taken up engineering and adminstering grants, editing journals, publishing articles, attending conferences, responding to the media, and testifying before Congressional committees.

resources — A neutral term which has come into wide use since the advent of the Community Development Block Grant. A "hot" topic is neighborhood resource allocation: how it is to be achieved (a) equitably, (b) efficiently, (c) in a politically satisfactory manner. Neutral the term may be, but Solomonic the challenge of its operationalization.

responsive — If there is a humanitarian pivot point on which all the language of computer sciences, cybernetics, systems analysis, space exploration, game theory and technological warfare turns, it is to be found in the derisory number of words such as this one. Sensitive is another, as in "neighborhood sensitive." In the larger metaphorical context, however, sensitivity and responsiveness call to mind images of combat troops distributing candy bars to orphans.

retrofit — Aerospace origin. Re-engineering to correct design defects or to bring up to a higher technical standard. Generally a positive word as in, "We're initiating a winterization program to retrofit older low/mod dwellings with energy saving improvements." A tendency has been noted, however, for officials to retrofit incoherent or ineligible practices with a rationale acceptable to the Feds. Example: "The mayor wants to spend CD money on band uniforms. We'll have to retrofit it to the guidelines later."

revitalize — A key concept. Related to improve, develop, upgrade, stabilize, rehabilitate, renew, maintain, preserve. All have in common the gross meaning: "do good to." Thus if things are presently okay, we want to keep them that way, and if they're not, we want to help them toward an okay state. However, treacherous subtleties creep in, so that the words must be used with caution. To preserve, for example, may be code for condoning or encouraging gentrification (q.v.), as through historic district designation. To stabilize, on the other hand, may be code for sanctioning racially negative attitudes and exclusionary housing practices in ethnic neighborhoods. And to renew still carries, in some quarters, old terrors associated with Urban Renewal. Revitalize and revitalization have come to the fore as the most vaguely well-intentioned and therefore least dangerous of the lot.

- S T U W -

shot, take a...at — Origin of the expression could be common slang or rocketry. In the public sector one must always be conscious of the obligation to take a shot at eradicating slums and blight, however long the odds.

situation, no win — A circumstnace to be avoided whereever possible. From game theory. To be appointed director of an agency about to be defunded is a no-win situation. Any public sector actor who finds himself more than once or twice in no-win situations should seriously review his apptitude for the calling.

sixties, the — The term has begun to crystalize pejoratively. A sixties approach, or a sixties conceptualization of the problem, or a sixties response all imply an inability to get beyond the now increasingly discredited Great Society. In the sixties there was a belief that, "government could do it all," a neglect of the role of the private sector, an insufficient awareness of neighborhoods. Sic transit sapientia urbis.

smokestacks, chase of — Chasing smokestacks refers to the allegedly futile effort on the part of some older cities to resurrect their declining industrial base by luring in more of the same. Always pejorative. Thus: "An economic development program based on chasing smokestacks is just so much pissing in the wind." This bit of imagery, by the way, and though inadvertent, has a picturesque quality not often encountered.

spillover. — In ordinary life what happens when you slosh your tea. In the urban world spillover indicates things that happened that were not forseen or not supposed to happen according to the strategy. In economics, externalities. Example: "The spillover effect of our marketing program was to drive up prices so fast I can't find a damn house I can afford!"

state, of the art, of the practice, of the knowledge — All are portentous expressions used by practioners with a certain awe. All suggest current and heady frontiers. To use any of these phrases in connection with one's own profession is to identify one's self with the mystical body. A recent address on neighborhood revitalization was entitled: "Where the State-of-the-Art is Going in the Eighties." Hyphens seem to be preferred but are still optional.

stone, cast in — A delightfully mixed metaphor now often heard. It is a telescoping of carved in stone and cast in concrete. Almost always used in the deprecatory negative. For example, the proposer of a new program will reassure his

hearers that, "Nothing at this point in time is cast in stone." This usually means that some critical steps have already been taken or are being attemped and that one should be on one's guard.

strategy — Military and game theory origins. Implies a demonstrable opponent, definable goals, sufficient resources. An urban strategy, therefore, designed to eradicate slums and blight, benefit low and moderate income residents, preserve historic structures, contribute to economic development, encourage rational land use patterns, deconcentrate minorities, etc., etc. might be looked up as in the extreme ambitious. It is nevertheless now no more acceptable to proceed without a strategy than to come to work without socks.

structure — Like component (q.v.) this is a neutral, basal term. A novice is usually on safe ground (so long as he or she does not become unpleasant about it) in suggesting that, "Our take-off point probably ought to be an adequate decision-making structure." The one caveat is that this sort of language should not be tried out in the presence of hard core political types who are liable to make derisive remarks.

target — Also targetted, targetting, on target. Since targetted neighborhoods are presumably the beneficiaries of special aid, one would like to think the derivation of this term is from marksmanship, as in "scoring a bull's eye" and thus getting things exactly right. However, one cannot, in the expression right on target, help but think of the Strategic Air Command. A "hot" issue these days is targetting vs. spreading discretionary resources (q.v.) Targetting may be the rational approach, but local political folkways may say you can't get away with it. Targetted tandem, a wonderfully euphonious term, is highly technical in nature and available only to housing specialists.

thrust — A term shared with other semi-professional jargons. Indicates the purport of, the emphasis, etc. "The thrust of his remarks was that our CP plan isn't up to speed." If thrust suggests virility and forcefullness (a sword thrust), it also suggests the message was so unclear one could only get a rough idea of what was intended. Picture a pugilistic thrust delivered from inside a canvas bag.

time frame, time horizon — These are among the relatively few terms by which Urbababble acknowledges chronology. Furthermore, they tend to be future-oriented and initiative specific. Example: "We're talking about a six month time frame for getting that high impact beautification program up and running." There is

little sense of evolution in the dialect or of a usable past more than twenty years deep (at the most), though people talk constantly of learning from our mistakes. So far as metaphor circumscribes them, Urbababblians have been orphaned from history.

tracking — Also monitoring. From space technology. Sherlock Holmes' method of "tracking" was, for example, to follow the prints left by bicycle tires through marshy ground. So practiced was his eye, so fine a "tracker" that Holmes could tell from these marks alone that the rider wore a pince nez and had had two cutlets for lunch. Present usage implies a process more remote as in, "We ought to track the fall-out from those 312 turn-downs." Tracking and monitoring are conceded to be very useful activities which, because tedious, somebody else obviously must be assigned to look after.

triage — From the French battlefields of World War I. The wounded were divided into three categories: those whose injuries were minor, serious, or fatal. Scarce medical attention was concentrated on the seriously wounded, since they alone would not survive without it, while the rest would almost surely recover without help or almost surely die even with it. As presently used, refers to the alleged practice of withholding discretionary resources (though not routine services) from "bombed out" neighborhoods on the grounds that since there will never be enough to solve the problem, the investment would be wasted. In older "distressed" cities the subject of triage carries with it a sense of high drama, life or death decision-making, and the excitement of potentially stirring up the "crazies." In such cities community development careers have literally been cut short by the imprudent mention of triage. In younger, growing cities, on the other hand, and outside the orbit of the New York Times, you may have to explain what you are talking about to people who have been doing what you are talking about all along. In its most simplistic terms the triage debate is cast as (a) no more than common sense, or (b) genocide.

universe — A broad gauge (q. v.) concept related to the big picture (q. v.). By implication the speaker asserts the intellectual capacity (somebody's if not his) to encompass everything in the area under discussion. Example: "When you consider the universe of treatment modalities, low interest loan programs have to rate near the top."

wash out — Derived from sports slang which derived the term from civil engineering, as in a "washed out embankment." If you wash out in spring training, you may have to go back to vocational school. The effect is similar in the urban sphere. A negatively impacting Federal directive (i.e. a base closing) can have a devastating wash-out effect on a local economic development

strategy. The best safeguard against this form of wash-out (as well as many others) is to have a powerful Congressional delegation in bed with your mayor.

world, real — A geo-socio-political state also referred to as "out there." A real world sense of priorities is sometimes contrasted with the bureaucratic agenda. It is good for a practioner to be oriented to the real world, so long as he doesn't lose contact with his funding sources. Those who take the real world to be the only world are liable to turn into activists.

III

URBABABBLE CONSIDERED

Every trade, profession, sport and hobby has its special terms, its peculiar language. Urban and community development is no exception. There are those in the field who use its jargon constantly, unconsciously and with apparent pleasure. There are others who wince when a colleague suggests that, "You ought to interface with contract compliance on that," or wants "some command level sign off before the new treatment modalities go into effect."

To the purists this is corruption of the Mother Tongue and a sign of the degenerate age we live in. With no apparent success, they deplore jargon - the government variety second only to that of educationalists - since here our institutions themselves seem to be leading us linguistically astray.

It is easy to scold - easier still when the idiom is so grey and dehumanized as that which we will call Urbababble. But pause for a moment. Let us look at it, or listen to it, in a more neutral and inquiring spirit. Let's consider the derivation of some of the terms and what those derivations imply. Let's think about the lexicon and how it both characterizes the role of those who use it and defines - perhaps distorts - the external reality to which it is applied.

This is no idle exercise. One of the preoccupations of modern philosophy has been the extent to which we and our world are what our language makes them. Just think of the different images brought to mind and the powerful

mental reflexes that occur when a single individual is described as (a) a no-good Welfare cheat; or (b) a culturally deprived, skill-deficient job seeker.

Where do the words and phrases come from that are so current with HUD bureaucrats, community development officials and even neighborhood residents who have entered the CDBG and affliated sub-cultures? Feedback, input/output, component, interface, prioritize, fast track, mainstream, task force, strategy, attack, bail-out, marshall, operationalize, model, parameter, facilitate, impaction, co-venture, leverage, bottom line... These are just a few of the terms. When one listens to them, a family of origins begins to emerge. Computer sciences, cybernetics, systems analysis are prominent. So are expressions that come from the military or space exploration. Some have the flavor of financial speculation. A few - proving that there is still a little fun in the world - come from sports. Notably scarce or missing, on the other hand, are terms from the biological sciences, history, literature and folklore, religion, medicine, or the rich ethnic heritage so useful for invective.

Some points can be made simply on the basis of these observations. The urban idiom, before all else, is depersonalized. It does not address, as ethnic humor so wonderfully does, individual and cultural quirks, venality and relative incompetence. It is not a funny idiom nor a colorful one; instead it is dominated by versions of technocracy. Furthermore, its military borrowings are not bloody and heroic but rather taken, as it were, from vast war games fought with rubber bullets and won or lost on theoretical cost/

benefit trade-offs. The exceptions are so few they have an anachronistic quality. "Bite the bullet," "in the trenches," "triage," "task force" are among the instances drawn from the world wars or before. No reference to Vietnam comes to mind.

Grafted onto this vocabulary, which seems to bracket the Cold War and the era of Sputnik, is another from corporate planning, economic analysis and go-go finance. Terms with this latter provenance are rapidly increasing as economic development and a reawakened awareness of business come to the fore. The bottom line (and the new orthodoxy) is that "government can't do it all."

One might suggest that what is going on here is the unconscious transference of terminology from areas of endeavor in which Americans feel they have been notably successful - EDP, the space race, military technique and technology, corporate development, marketing - to a quite different area, the urban scene, where America has witnessed quite spectacular disasters. It is thus as if by some linguistic magic stubborn social conditions could be transformed into technical and logistical problems. Looked at in this way, there is beneath the surface of an idiom almost preternaturally rational the most primitive kind of superstitious faith.

The kernel of this faith appears to be the avoidance of failure, of facing possibly intractable moral dillemmas. There are words for failure - "horror story" for instance - but they are used in a hyperbolic cartoon way. They do not challenge either the rightness or the capacity of the essential

enterprise.

Consider the host of military borrowings once again. Terms such as strategy, game plan, coordinated attack suggest maneuvers across an empty terrain. The enemy is a computer simulation. Airborne troops "hit the ground running" to the sound of their own weaponry. There will be no deaths and no possibility of defeat - only relative and statistical measures of success.

The roles and characteristics of the "practioners" is of a piece with the idiom's military, EDP and corporate derivations. By metaphoric implication the "decision-makers" are likened to SAC generals in concrete command centers, or the tensely focussed technicians at Mission Control, or corporate planners working out an acquisition strategy. Their habitats are various forms of the bunker - climate controlled, buffered from the confusion of the outside world, places where "messy" events from the "real world" are rationalized on computer maps and viewing screens.

Everywhere the personal and risky are replaced by the impersonal and risk-minimized. To say of an official, "He made a decision," is to assert individual responsibility and possibly a high stakes gamble; to say, on the other hand, "He took part in the decision-making process," reifies process in such a way as to hedge individual participation, dilute responsibility and spread any possibility of blame.

Another conspicuous feature of the idiom is its constant inflation of the caliber of what is taking place, along with that of the actors. "Task force"

is an example. A task force may consist of three harried minor officials called together to straighten out a botched contract or to do a study that will buy time for a chief executive who doesn't want to make a decision on rent control. It may be clear to everybody, including themselves, that they are no more than three harried minor officials; yet the power of language is still there to suggest a tremendous weight of mission and marshalled military power.

Two characteristics constantly imputed by metaphor are intensity and effectiveness. Take "up to speed" for instance. This phrase suggests the velocity required to get an aircraft off the ground. It is not merely kinetic but hyperkinetic. "Action" is another such word, represented graphically by "speed writing" (a form of italic), as in the forward-leaning script adopted by the Rio Grande when it became the action railroad in the 1960's. Those who use the language appear not content to have you believe simply that they are "doing something," but rather that they are doing something with the disciplined drive of the 82nd Airborne on a live ammunition field exercise.

In short, while you are there in front of the t.v., they are on call, on the ready, backed up by computerized logistical support, waiting for the hatch to open, prepared to "hit the ground running" with assault rifles clean and faces smudged with cork, all for - what?

Results. "Results are the name of the game." Output is what it's "all about." "Taking on the tough ones" must mean wrestling the tough ones to

the ground. "Getting a leg up" ought to count as one more leg toward surmounting the barrier and having things "all come right in the end."

Yet herein lies a great cause for chagrin, generated right out of the metaphors themselves. After all this intensity of attack, broad scope of operations, repeated assertions of achievement, exactly what objectives have been secured, what battles won, what daunting threat "put to sleep?" We don't know. The trail of metaphor simply ends. We find ourselves as if watching an odd war movie in which, after detailed preparations, technological back-up of the most sophisticated kind, tough "macho" paratroop attack, the troops are suddenly milling about on the ground with smoke-reddened eyes, at a loss to know where they are, or why they are there, or who the enemy is, or how anyone will determine whether he has been defeated or not.

This takes us a next step: to the consideration of the external world toward which all this investment and activity and "expertise" are presumably directed. And just here the variety of metaphor and the certainties it implies fall off very sharply.

What is "out there" in metaphor? We find low and moderate (low/mod) households. We know there are minorities, as well as cities and people in distress. Because we have service delivery systems, there must be someone to whom services need to be delivered. Impacted areas are a concern, and it is those that one must think about turning into targets. Just so. It is as if we were seeing the world through a bomb sight, or through the wrong end of a telescope. We are so very far away there are no individuals

- good or bad, likable or unlikable, deserving or undeserving. Everyone down there is a "resident," a abstract identification akin to "person." To be a resident is to have rights, democratic expectations, but no features. Are the people down there heroic? Oppressed? Capable? Able to communicate? Like us? Not like us? We don't know. The stock of available metaphor has nothing to tell us. In fact the landscape even appears to be receding farther. One no longer hears about "poor people" - who were at least people - and the rather apocalyptic "slums and blight," while still in the regulations, is seldom used.

If this metaphorically impoverished place and its inhabitants are part of the objective of the enterprise, if assisting them is the result around which so much is oriented, how exactly does the field commander overseeing a war games exercise or the EDP professional or the corporate strategist relate? But at this point we begin to find ourselves going around in a circle, posing unaswerable questions just in different ways.

There is an important extrapolation to be made from the jargon - one based on the absence of metaphor. That is Urbababble's pudeur to use a necessary foreign phrase. It shows an increasing self-consciousness and sensitivity to any terms whatever that imply invidious distinctions among people, namely those it categorizes under the huge umbrella of low and mod.

Years ago it was respectable to talk about the "deserving poor." The "deserving poor"were in contrast to others poor or on their way down because drink or their natures or "something" doomed them to a low place in society. Thus anyone over thirty-five or forty who grew up in a small town grew up

with the notion that some few inhabitants were "no good" or "bad eggs" or the like - peremptory categorizations which served to order the world, to make it comprehensible and to enforce notions of personal responsibility.

Urbababble will not admit of these perhaps cruel discriminations. Low and moderate income households becomes a vast, bland denominator, removing all distinctions but that of household economy. "Distressed people" similarly extends a generalized sympathy to anyone defined by a set of income and related statistics.

Is it a bad thing that the jargon has obliterated so many differentiations made in reality - made readily enough in their personal lives even by those who are fluent in the jargon - as for instance between a "low/mod" widow of quiet habits and a "low/mod" arson-prone juvenile? One may not want to say exactly that it is a bad thing; yet at the same time one does have to point out that language which chooses to be blind to so many realities, notably those of behavior, has linguistically detached the enterprise from its field of action.

There is, fortunately, still vivid life out there among the "decision-makers." While one community development official will guide a visitor through a slum, remarking that it is an "impacted area the City doesn't have a handle on yet," in another city an official with his umbilicus still attached to mother wit will bellow at you: "This goddam place is the pits! We don't know what the hell to do about it."

Yet refreshing as it is, it is private talk, between friends. The vernacular is too gross, too opinionated to be sanctioned in public, so that even an individual such as this one, if invited to speak at a conference, would re-

treat into safer language - despite the fact that it says nothing, or says oddly distorted things no one will call attention to. Urbababble is thus a powerful teacher and censor, the more so because no identifiable chancellery can be held responsible for it. It is the language of a self-conscious subculture, taught and enforced by peers. I do not have to "interface" with you; I do not have to receive your "feedback." Yet life may feel easier, the professional surroundings more genial if I do. It is the banker's white shirt, the VFW flag lapel pin. Urbababble marks you as one of "us."

Suppose one were to argue - as we have - that the bulk of urban jargon comes from computer sciences, cybernetics, operations research, game theory, Cold War militarism, the space race - a verbal museum of aspects of the 1950's in fact.

Suppose one were further to argue that notable features of the jargon are its depersonalization, macho cast, innocence of history, obsession with technology, asserted accomplishment, blindness to social or moral complexity, lack of humor. What then? What does this strangelovian background of metaphor have to do with actual performance in the urban world?

For instance, does an individual's use of jargon correlate with inability to achieve a more humane perspective? Do the jargon-addicted more often than the average fool themselves into thinking they have contributed to human betterment when they have really not?

The answer is that these are probably the wrong kind of question. The subject has to be approached in a much more general way - neither press-

ing down too hard on the individual consequences of metaphor, nor letting their generalized effects escape.

In this spirit one can say that it is sobering, at the least, that the unconsciously adopted language of the urban enterprise is so remote from the overwhelming challenge for that enterprise: coming to terms with human diversity and conflicting social values. What strikes one above all else about Urbababble is how insufficient it is in this regard, how essentially inert and incapable of response, for all its emphasis on information, intention and action. In sum, it is a radically wrong language - wrong at such a fundamental level that carping about its individual absurdities misses the point.

The conclusion is not simply, as the little girl said to her younger sister, that "You don't talk good." Language shapes and reflects simultaneously. If one line of investigation (the present one), therefore, has addressed the shaping power of language, its companion needs to be inquiry into questions of needs and rights, expectations and responsibilities, individual and community as opposed to institutional means for maintaining the common fabric. In short, it would be an inquiry into a social contract so badly muddled that many of the institutions derived from it have missions they cannot now possibly accomplish.